

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Dennis Hokama

Dennis Hokama, youngest of three children of Eiso Hokama and Kiyoko Higa Hokama who were originally from Maui, was born in 1947 in Lāna‘i City, Lāna‘i. Eiso and Kiyoko came to Lāna‘i from Maui as children with their parents, who were immigrants from Okinawa. Eiso held a variety of jobs for Hawaiian Pineapple Company, including heavy equipment operator, welder, and construction supervisor. Kiyoko worked at the store known as International Food and Clothing Center.

Dennis Hokama and siblings grew up in Down Camp at the family home, located at Fraser Avenue and Thirteenth Street. He attended Lāna‘i High and Elementary School. During summer vacations, he worked in the pineapple fields.

After graduating in 1965, he left to attend University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, earning a fifth-year teaching certificate in 1970.

That same year, he began his long career as an educator, teaching social studies at ‘Aiea High School. In 1976, he returned to Lāna‘i High and Elementary School where he taught; three years later, he was named vice principal at the school.

In 1989, he again left Lāna‘i to be principal at Ha‘ikū Elementary School on Maui. Two years later, he became principal at Kalama Intermediate School.

In 1995, he was named principal at Honolulu’s Roosevelt High School.

Retired since 2007, Dennis Hokama remains active in teacher and government union affairs. Married to Bonnie since 1972, he has two adult daughters. He still owns a home on Lāna‘i.

Tape Nos. 56-19-1-11 and 56-20-1-11

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Dennis Hokama (DH)

Honolulu, O‘ahu

October 21, 2011

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

WN: Okay, this is an interview with Dennis Hokama for the Lāna‘i City oral history project. Today is October 21, 2011. Interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Good morning, Dennis.

DH: Good morning.

WN: What we’re going to do today is ask you about your background—your family background—your mom and your dad, what you know about them, their background. Then we’ll get into your growing up on Lāna‘i, getting into your childhood, and talk about, you know, the neighborhood and what you did as a kid.

DH: That’s all I can remember today.

WN: Yeah. (WN and MK laugh.)

DH: Don’t want to remember anything else. (Chuckles)

WN: Well, hopefully we can progress to eventually your schooling and get a little bit into your professional career.

DH: No need to do that.

WN: Well . . .

DH: The early part was fun. (Laughs)

WN: Well, we’ll concentrate mostly on your Lāna‘i City experiences between the time you were born in 1947 to the time you left in 1965. Right?

DH: Right.

WN: Okay, let’s start. The first question we want to ask you is when and where you were born. What year and where.

DH: I was born [in] 1947 in Lāna‘i City.

WN: Tell us about your father, first of all.

DH: My dad, Eiso Hokama, worked for the pineapple plantation [Hawaiian Pineapple Company's Lāna'i Plantation] and probably did just about every conceivable laborer's job that was connected with the plantation. Much of his early adult life with the plantation was as a heavy-equipment operator. And then towards the latter part of his career with the plantation was as a welder for the company. When he got out of being a heavy-equipment operator, then as a welder, and then, soon after that, as a supervisor of that construction part of the plantation, he ended his career there with the plantation, as a supervisor in that department.

WN: And when you say "plantation," you mean Hawaiian Pineapple Company?

DH: Hawaiian Pineapple Company, then [in 1960 it became known as] Dole [Corporation].

WN: And how did he arrive or what brought him to Lāna'i in the first place?

DH: Originally born and raised, just prior to becoming a teenager, on the island of Maui. His family was attached to a piggery [at Pihana Camp, Wailuku, Maui], so his dad worked for a piggery, but then the opportunity to work on the pineapple plantation brought the family over to Lāna'i.

WN: Do you know about when, how old he was when he . . .

DH: My dad was just preteen. I'd say maybe about eleven, twelve years old at that time.

WN: And do you know anything about his parents?

DH: My grandfather, very little. He passed away before I was born. My grandmother [Oto Hokama], I knew very well. In fact, she used to baby-sit me before I started school. Mom [Kiyoko Hokama] and Dad was working, and so she was there to meet me when the preschool bus would bring me home and fed me my lunch and I took my nap there. She passed away well into her eighties, so I was able to enjoy much of her life while she was living on Lāna'i also. Just a block away from where I lived.

WN: And she's originally from Okinawa?

DH: Originally from Okinawa, yes.

WN: Do you know what part?

DH: No, I don't.

WN: Okay. And you talked about that piggery. It wasn't a piggery that they owned . . .

DH: No, they worked on it.

WN: I see. And okay, tell us about your mother.

DH: My mom, Kiyoko Higa—her maiden name—also came from Maui. I'm not certain at what age she came to Lāna'i, but very early in her life also. Went up to the eighth grade, schooling on Lāna'i. And came from a very large family, so she worked—not certain what she was doing working at that early age. But later on, prior to my going to school, she worked for the plantation as soon as she was of age to work in the plantation. And later, in my very early childhood,

probably about in the first or second grade, she was hired by—at that time—Pedro de la Cruz, who had opened a grocery store on Lāna‘i. So she worked in the grocery store, owned by Pedro de la Cruz, called the International Food and Clothing [Center]. And worked there until she retired in her mid-fifties.

WN: And what do you know about her family—her parents?

DH: My grandfather, Kama Higa, passed away in my early elementary years. By that time, he was already retired from the pineapple plantation. My grandma, Kame Higa, worked for the plantation also. She lived to a ripe old age, well into her eighties also. And what was really nice—one side, the Hokama family grandparents lived a block away on one side of our home. The Higa side lived a block away on the other side. So we were very close, as a family, grandparents. So Higa side was also very close to us. So we were all involved in taking care of each other, or Grandma helping taking care of us. Grandma raised chickens and vegetables in her retirement. Also took in laundry—plantation workers’—to supplement the family income.

WN: This is your maternal grandmother?

DH: Yes, yes.

WN: Now, they were both Okinawan, you know, both sides. Was there a section in Lāna‘i where Okinawans lived? Or were they pretty much scattered?

DH: It was pretty much scattered. In the area where we lived, it was, I would say, just as many Filipino families as there were Japanese and other Okinawan families. So we were in a very mixed part of the city. We were part of that town called “Down Camp,” so our site was very mixed, very diverse.

WN: So this house that you grew up in—Fraser and Thirteenth street . . .

DH: Thirteenth.

WN: . . . that was Down Camp?

DH: That was Down Camp.

WN: Okay. So tell us about what growing up was like on Lāna‘i.

DH: I feel extremely fortunate that I had this wonderful experience of growing up on Lāna‘i. I took it for granted at that particular time because we always believed that we were so small and far away from what we heard were the bright lights and everything else of Honolulu, Maui, and the other places. But the experiences of growing up on Lāna‘i were just warm, comfortable, never felt threatened, always had something to do, always had friends and family around. It was the kind of a place that you never felt at a loss for doing things. You never felt at a loss of not knowing people. Never felt that you could get lost. You were able to go as far as you would be able to traverse. Very early, I guess that’s just being able to walk or run. The neighborhood was just full of your family or friends. A little later, maybe you had a bicycle, and that could take you to the outer reaches of the town itself. A little later, you may have your driver’s license. You could drive to the outer edges of the whole island. Every place was very familiar, and everything about the community and the island became very familiar as you grew older. The total environment was your home, or your playground. You knew everybody, and everybody knew you. Definitely had

to behave yourself because everybody knew you, and you couldn't do naughty things elsewhere without parents finding out that you did naughty things.

WN: (Chuckles) Did you do naughty things?

DH: Especially at school.

(Laughter)

WN: Before we get into that, I wanted to ask you about your house. What was that like? Describe your house for us.

DH: Really interesting because I grew up with two sisters. So there were five of us in our family, and my two sisters were a little older than me. My oldest sister, Aimee, was three years older than me. My other sister (Jane) was in the middle of us, and she was two years older than me. But we all grew up in this two-bedroom house, and I believe it wasn't more than 800 square feet, or maybe closer to 600 square feet. I'm not sure, but it was very small. But you never really took notice of how small it was. The lot size itself was less than 4,000 square feet. I can remember my early experiences there because there was no flushing toilet. I remember going outside and . . .

(Telephone rings.)

That's me.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

DH: One of the early experiences that I have in that house was, you know, being in a house with no toilet that flushed. So, I guess, maybe being a young-enough child, I could go outside or I was taken outside and just did my business out there, whether it was digging a hole or. . . . But there was a community outhouse that people in the neighborhood would go to. There was also a community bath—a *furo*—that people could go to. I recall being taken there by my mom. The flush toilet didn't come about until maybe about 1950, '51. So my first remembrance was having no flush toilet. Also being very afraid of the public outhouse. (MK chuckles.) Always had this fear of falling in. (Laughs) In fact, my recollection was that if some kid was not able to be found or something, one of the first places they would look would be in the outhouse. They'd look down the holes. (WN chuckles.) But fortunately, no one was ever found in the hole, but that was always somehow on my mind.

WN: So these were like wooden seats or holes that you sit on.

DH: Right. Wooden seats on top of a hole.

WN: And how far was the outhouse from your house?

DH: It was maybe about crossing the street and a house away from where I was. So it was very close. I think for my parents, maybe, it was just about, you know, a minute walk or so. It was very, very close.

WN: So if you had to go in the middle of the night, there was no problem. Just. . . .

- DH: I don't know. In the middle of the night, I think people probably just went outside their home. (WN chuckles.) Found a bush or something, I'm not certain. Pretty dark, too, so.
- WN: Right.
- MK: How about laundry facilities back then?
- DH: Laundry facilities. . . . Geez. My early recollection of my mother doing laundry—and my mother also used to take in laundry, and she would do some during the weekends. We had kind of a lean-to that was attached to the house. There was a washtub in there. She also had a fire pit with a large *tarai*, or tub. She would burn firewood to heat up the water in the washtub and boil all these heavily soiled plantation clothes in soapy water. So, much of it was hand washed like that. The first washing machine I think I recall was those with the big, round exposed tub with the roller thing on top. Then, you kind of hand rolled the clothes to wring out the clothes. But I recall very vividly the washboard. This brown [Fels Naptha] soap that they needed, and you'd scrub the heavily soiled thing, and you'd run it over the washboard.
- WN: And you said that your mom and your grandmother also took in laundry.
- DH: Yeah.
- WN: What do you mean by that? I mean, who did they work for . . .
- DH: I guess, some of the plantation men—the Filipino men—who were on Lānaʻi to work in the plantations, were single men who didn't have wives to do their laundry, sent out their laundry to people who were willing to do their laundry for them.
- WN: And they got paid . . .
- DH: And they got paid.
- WN: . . . to do that?
- DH: Uh-huh [yes]. So my mom did that just on the weekends or something. But she would also do it with—I mean, my dad's clothes got heavily soiled, too, so that was all part of that, so.
- WN: Did she iron, also?
- DH: Yeah. She ironed. They starched, also. They starched, and they hung up the laundry. Then, after picking up the dried laundry, sprinkling it with water, rolling it up, putting it away for a little while, and then ironing.
- WN: And you always remembered electric iron?
- DH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- WN: You said there was an outhouse, and then there was a public *furo*. So in the beginning, when you were really young, you didn't have any running water? No plumbing?
- DH: There was. There was running water. Kitchen sink. I think there was some hose bibs or some water faucets outside. But other than that, . . .

MK: And then, when you look back on that house—you have that lean-to area that was used for doing laundry—what was in the yard or garden?

DH: A little bit of gardening, I would think, that I can recall. But I think every house, at that time, also had a kerosene tank, which was like a fifty-five-gallon drum set on its side, with a spigot, on top of a stand. The kerosene truck would come by, every now and then, to fill up the tank. The kerosene was used for the kerosene stove and the [water] heater. I think most houses had kerosene heaters and kerosene stoves at that time.

Also, what else was in the yard? The large, five-gallon garbage pail that we all put out because the piggery person would come by to pick up garbage to take down to the piggery to feed the pigs. We had a plantation piggery at that time.

WN: Oh, run by the plantation?

DH: Run by the plantation. Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: You had to separate your garbage, I guess. What went in the garbage thing and what went in the trash?

DH: The garbage was all the foodstuff. All of your vegetable leavings, all of your uneaten food—that kind of thing. All of your paper and can things and inedible things, all went into the trash can. What was amazing, also, in those days that I recall was the trash can. There were no regulations as to the size or the weight of the trash cans that were left out for the trash collectors to pick up. The trash collectors were, what I recall, a private operation, someone from the community, who had a kind of a flatbed truck, would come by with his workers—these Filipino men who weren't the biggest people, but very strong and wiry. They would actually pick up those fifty-five-gallon drums that were heavy, even when empty. Yet, they were able to pick them up and empty it out on the flatbed truck. I mean, I just started thinking about it not too long ago about how strong and how hard these guys worked and were capable of doing that. Try picking up a fifty-five-gallon metal drum, empty. (Chuckles) But things got done.

MK: You know, earlier, you mentioned that one of your grandmothers had things growing, yeah? How about in your house, what did you folks grow . . .

DH: My house, not very much. I can't really recall. Maybe green onions or that kind of thing. But both of my grandmothers had very large gardens. So they were prolific gardeners—sweet potatoes, eggplant, lettuce—Mānoa lettuce. Very prolific. Very nice. In fact, we had so much Mānoa lettuce. Growing up, I didn't care for vegetables, so we had all this nice stuff, which I didn't care for, which I love today. . . . In fact, I can't remember the last time I bought a head of Mānoa lettuce. Do they still sell Mānoa lettuce?

WN: Mm-hmm [yes].

DH: They do?

WN: They do.

DH: (Chuckles) They have all these other green, leafy stuff, but yeah.

WN: Mānoa lettuce is expensive.

- DH: Very expensive, yeah. Just eating it with mayonnaise and *shōyu*, yeah. (WN and MK laugh.) Great dressing. (Laughs)
- WN: You know, you said the plantation had a piggery. What was the piggery for?
- DH: That was to raise pigs for community consumption.
- WN: And then, what? They would sell the pork, or . . .
- DH: I guess the pork would end up in the stores—in the market. But they had its own slaughterhouse.
- WN: So actually, then, the plantation was in the business of providing food for the citizens?
- DH: I guess that was one of the attractive parts about the community in the early days—when the community was extremely self-sufficient in many respects. Although, I guess, when you think about it, many of the things had to be shipped in. You know, your milk, your bread, your—I guess I won't say eggs because I recall both of my grandparents also raising chickens. We got all of our eggs from those chickens.
- WN: Rice?
- DH: Rice, of course, had to come in from the outside. But again, the pork. Most people consumed probably more pork than beef in those days. But all of the pork was raised there at the piggery and slaughtered there.
- WN: Was beef there?
- DH: No beef. There may have been some individual, *kuleana* farmer types who would maybe raise a few heads of beef, but I don't recall that really ending up on our table, you know. But that piggery, which was located about—I'd say maybe a couple of miles or two miles or so outside of the city limits was also a very popular place for us to hike and to play at. We would, you know, plan outings or hiking trips. Hiking down to the piggery, spending some time down there.
- WN: How far was the piggery from your house?
- DH: I'd say maybe about two miles away, crossing through the pineapple fields.
- WN: Now getting back to your house, I know Lāna'i City was pretty much of a planned community. I was wondering if the houses were all pretty much the same, in terms of size and layout and so forth.
- DH: It was a very neat community, and it was, I guess, planned. It's a planned grid. *Makai, mauka* was in numbers. I was actually like the last street, so I was Thirteenth. And the other extreme end was Second Street. I don't recall a First Street or a Fourteenth. The Fourteenth would have been Kaunalapau Highway. That's the one that takes you to the airport. And the cross grid was alphabetical. It was words in alphabetical order. But again, starting with F, Fraser; G, Gay; H, Houston; I, 'Ilima; and so on. So it was kind of neat. But growing up in such a small community, we never really remembered places or homes by number addresses or street addresses. Because it was small enough, you were able to locate things by knowing other people's homes. Someone was located next to that home or close by. Plantation homes were somewhat uniform, I guess. We may have to have had one of the smaller ones, maybe, at two bedrooms. As I said earlier, maybe

600 to 800 square feet. Lot size, I'd say less than 4,000. A large lot may have been about 5,000 square feet. That would be extremely large, I guess.

WN: Your father was a heavy-equipment operator. Was that considered a higher-up job?

DH: Yeah, I guess that was more skilled, which was a departure from picking pineapples or planting pineapples, you know.

WN: I'm just wondering how the homes were laid out in terms of jobs. Was it in terms of jobs? You know, maybe the better-paying jobs were in one area. . . .

DH: Not so much that. It was mainly, you had your plantation-laboring employees, which could still be your skilled laborer. And what set apart—the difference was the supervisory people. The upper-management people may have their own section of the community that they had plantation homes that was set aside for those people. Lower management may be down to the *luna*—that's the field supervisor side—may still have been mixed in the community.

MK: And you know, earlier, you mentioned that your home was in Down Camp. So what were the names of other areas?

DH: There was "Up Camp."

(Laughter)

Down Camp was more—if you would look at the city in terms of a diagonal. . . . And the lower part, the main highway on the lower side was Fraser Avenue. In the middle was Lāna'i Avenue. Well, I guess Lāna'i Avenue was sort of in the middle, but . . .

WN: When you say, "above," you're talking about *mauka*?

DH: Right, *mauka*. So the Down Camp side was *makai*, and it was one corner, of a—if you look at it in terms of a square or a rectangle. Then the opposite angle—the opposite point, was the Up Camp side. *Mauka*. Just above Lāna'i Avenue, above where we were, just immediate *mauka* of us was Stable Camp. On the other side from Up Camp—*makai* of Up Camp was sort of the new housing area—Pālāwai housing that was built, maybe in the very late 1940s. So the newer homes at that particular time were what we called, "New Housing." That was built maybe, as I said, in the late 1940s, while [most of] the other plantation homes were [built in the] 1920s and 1930s.

WN: And your house was 1920s and 1930s?

DH: Yeah.

WN: And Stable Camp was named because there was the stable there?

DH: There was a stable at that time.

WN: Do you remember when horses were used?

DH: No, not as part of the—very much part of the plantation itself, you know. Pulling the trailers, pulling the plows. Not so much the horses. Maybe the mules and donkeys. Horses were part of the ranch.

WN: Oh, I see.

DH: Yeah, at the time. Ranching was also a large part of local history, pre my time. (Laughs) Remnants of the ranch [Lānaʻi Ranch, which closed in 1951] are still in existence and always has been, you know. Very important part of the lifestyle of Lānaʻi, yeah.

WN: And I think you mentioned this before, but your neighbors were Filipino and different ethnic groups, so there was no regard for ethnicity when they laid out the camp or when people were assigned to the . . .

DH: From my experiences from the time that I was growing up, it was already very mixed, very diverse. You know, although I recall my dad and his generation people talking about growing up there, and it was somewhat less diverse at that time. So they talked about areas where more of the Chinese or more the Koreans also lived, you know, as well as the Filipinos. Everybody talks about *Haole* Camp. Those were the managerial homes. But by my time, it was somewhat—there was a diversity already. So, I think when I was growing up there, in my childhood, this sense of calm and security and pleasantness was, you know, so much a part of growing up there. It was really nice. I can't recall—or I certainly didn't experience, you know, whatever stresses of early plantation life that my parents may have had. In fact, some of my earliest recollections was the strike of 1951. What I recall at that time, as a three, four-year-old was, oh, such a pleasant experience. This was like summer vacation that never ended. It was—every day's a holiday, you know?

WN: (Laughs) Oh, you're talking about the '51 strike?

DH: Yeah. It was such a social event. I mean, going to the soup kitchen, you see all your friends, you know, and your free movies. You know, the union provided free movies. So again, you know, the kind of stresses that our parents may have lived through a plantation period was certainly not something that my generation experienced. That's why I'd say that I was so fortunate in being able to grow up on Lānaʻi at that particular time because it was such a nice, fun experience, when I look back, you know.

WN: What do you recall about the [19]51 strike? I mean, you were four-years old. You mentioned the soup kitchen.

DH: I remember the soup kitchen. I guess, that was a large part of my memories. The soup kitchen or the union hall area where people gathered for evening socials, free movies, food. People gathered to talk story. You know, I can't really recall that much more.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

DH: Oh, that was such a pleasant experience.

WN: I was just wondering, though, after the strike was over, do you remember any differences from the time of during the strike and after the strike. I mean, were there free movies, for example? Anything like that?

DH: Oh, no, no. But then, the community theater was also part of the Dole Company, and we had movies. Yeah, there were free movies for people like myself, who was under five years old. I think that may have been the age limit where you could go into the theater for free, but. . . . (WN

and MK chuckle.) I think for us kids, it was always a really nice experience on the island, whether there was a strike or no strike. (Chuckles)

WN: Did you ever talk to your sisters about it who are older than you? Do you think they have a different view of the strike itself?

DH: We kind of talked about it, but you know, like me, they weren't that much older than me, so it was, again, for kids, everything was fun.

MK: You know, earlier, you were mentioning that as a child on Lānaʻi, there were always things to do. So what kinds of things did you folks do as kids?

DH: I'm not so certain if it occurred in other places other than Lānaʻi, but there was a season for everything—every kind of play. There was a season for marbles. That's when the marbles came out, and people got involved in playing marbles—marble tournaments—that kind of thing that the kids arranged on their own. There was a period for *peewee*. This was a thing made out of cut broomsticks, but that was a highly skilled game that only the more athletic, skilled guys would get involved in. But we would, as kids, watch; that was another season. Kite season. Sword-fighting season. Many yards would have hibiscus hedges. So, we would go into the hibiscus hedges and cut lengths of hibiscus branches, and that was our sword. There were particular periods that were used for, again, sword-fighting season. Pin guns. Have you heard of pin guns?

WN: No.

DH: You know those [clothes]pins that our moms would use to hang clothes?

WN: Yeah.

DH: You could take them apart, and there's a spring that hold those two pieces of wood, right?

WN: Yeah, yeah.

DH: So you could very easily rearrange that, do a little bit of whittling, and using pigeon peas as your ammo, you could fashion a little pin gun. Okay? So there was pin gun season. Peashooter season. Bow and arrow. We would go to this place called, "*Hau* Wood Forest." It was the *hau* plant. We would cut, again, lengths of *hau*, and kind of fashion a bow out of it—get some string, some cord—and you make a bow out of it. Then go back into the hibiscus hedge to get your arrows—to cut the arrows.

WN: Sounds dangerous.

DH: No, but we never shot it at people!

(Laughter)

Never shot it at people. Slingshot season was all year round.

(Laughter)

MK: What did you make your slingshot out of?

DH: Slingshots were made out of guava wood. It's going to the guava bush and looking for what you would consider to be a very nice *V* or a *U*. It's more a *U*. (Chuckles) Yeah, and you cut it and you dry it. The rubber would be from old tire inner tubes. So those were really good. Most people at that time were using the black, synthetic rubber because that was more prolific. There were very few that had the red rubber. That was the real rubber inner tubes. So those were premium if you could find red rubber inner tubes. Much later on, the old, yellow surgical inner tubes that you could get at the store. But those were pretty expensive. That, you would have to buy. But those were the real premium slingshots, if you were able to get some surgical tubing to make your slingshots out of. And the leather was from old gloves that plantation workers used. You know, the old glove to pick pineapples?

WN: The leather, you mean right . . .

DH: The old, leather gloves?

WN: . . . at the end [of the slingshot]?

DH: Yeah. So if you were able to find an old glove that you could cut up, that was what was used to hold your [ammunition] . . .

WN: Was there a name for that—that part? (Chuckles)

DH: I don't know.

WN: We're going to change tapes right now.

END OF TAPE NO. 56-19-1-11

TAPE NO. 56-20-1-11

WN: Okay, this is session two.

MK: Session one.

WN: I mean, I'm sorry, tape number two, session one with Dennis Hokama. We're talking about . . .

DH: Slingshots.

WN: . . . pin guns.

DH: (Laughs) Pin gun and slingshots.

WN: Yeah.

DH: Well, slingshots are highly technical instruments also, so aside from finding the perfect guava stick to make your [slingshot] out of, the different kinds of elastic to use to be the main part of the slingshot, I guess. Also the kind of ammo that you used could be very sophisticated. I guess, probably starting with the high end, which would be a ball bearing. You know, if you could find that. That was very highly valued, if you could find a ball bearing for your slingshot. Also very desired was marbles for the slingshot. One place that you could get your marbles or round things was the reflectors off of those plantation trucks—some of those trucks, the vehicles. The reflectors used these red *piries* [purie]. It's like marbles, but these were made into these reflectors.

So you could go up to some of these trucks, get your pocket knife out, and you could actually take some of these things out, and you would get some red marbles, or red *piries*. You either add it to your marble collection, or you could also use it for your slingshot.

WN: Did they let you do it, or you did it . . .

DH: No, you either took it out of a running truck, or if a truck was a derelict or something like that, then you would get it from there.

MK: Where would you get most of these supplies to make your toys?

DH: You have different areas, I guess. For me, again, I was lucky because I was on Fraser Avenue, and at that particular end of town, was one of the areas that the plantation stored its [equipment]—a lot of its equipment was down in that area. It also became a great playground because, you know, any kind of junk laying around—as kids, these were good places to play. The local dump, which was located just outside of the city limits—I’d say maybe about a quarter mile away—that was our favorite playground. Whenever we had the chance, we’d go down there, go to the dump, look for comic books. That was a tremendous find, if you could find comic books. Again, a car that was dumped or a derelict—that was a neat place to play. You know, again, finding things to do and finding places to play was never at a loss at a place like Lāna‘i, where the garbage dump could be your favorite playing place.

Aside from the seasonal games, you also had guava season. You would walk, again, outside the city limits, and wherever there was guava growing, you would find your guava. Mango season—not much mangoes on Lāna‘i, but there was a place just outside, again, of the city limits, which was called, “Oyama’s Farm.” Oyama used to have a little farm right outside over there, and there was this, I think, three large common mango trees. During the mango season, we would go there and pick some of these green mangoes, eat the green mangoes with vinegar and *shōyu* to your heart’s content, until you got a stomachache. Eat green guava with salt and pepper, until you got a stomachache. (DH and MK laugh.) But again, different seasons. Rose apple season, you would go to where the rose apple trees grew. Again, outside of town someplace.

WN: Besides mango, rose apple, and guava, what other fruits?

DH: That was about it. Oh, *pānini*. *Pānini* fruit.

WN: Yeah, cactus?

DH: The cactus fruit, the red stuff. I mean, it’s actually kind of a good-eating thing. But I mean, it wasn’t very popular for people to eat, but if you wanted to eat a sweet fruit, that was something that could be eaten. You got to be really careful how you pick it, though. You need to kind of wipe it with a damp cloth or rag to get off this little, thorny, hairy things, yeah.

WN: And you would cut off the green skin?

DH: No, not . . .

WN: Is that how it works?

DH: No, there’s a fruit. Not the leaves. There was a fruit that grew. It flowered and then, it fruited. Kind of a succulent, red fruit. That could be eaten. Those would be places that we would either

walk [to]—so we did a lot of hiking, walking—or we would ride our bikes. So you know, as I said earlier, when you were little kids, you could walk just about every place. You got bicycles, you could go even a little further. With cars and jeeps, you could go even further and do more things.

MK: And how about ocean-side activities?

DH: For many of us—I guess as we were growing up yet, at that time, the opportunity was mainly going down to Hulopo‘e Bay or Mānele Bay at that time. But that was just going during the weekends if Mom and Dad took us down. My family wasn’t so much of a fisherman’s family, so we weren’t that much of a water people or beach people. But we always looked forward to having the opportunity to go down to the beach. I mean, that was really important if we could, but it wasn’t all that often that we had a chance to go to the beach.

WN: Where did you learn to swim?

DH: Probably Mānele Bay, just jumping in the water and just—there was a little kiddy pond down there that was fashioned out of the tidal pool area and enhanced with dynamite. (DH and WN chuckle.) Back in the old days. So they made a large pool out of that. I guess every kid growing up on Lāna‘i may have learned how to swim, probably in that little pool.

WN: Did they have like reservoirs up *mauka*?

DH: Yeah, but that was not something that was open to the public or was encouraged. I mean, we always thought about it as being too deep and too scary to go jump into something like that. But they were fenced in also, so we wouldn’t have had the opportunity to jump in those things.

MK: You know, growing up on a plantation, what areas were off-limits? Or what activities were off-limits to you folks as kids?

DH: There weren’t really stringent rules that were really enforced. If there was any “no-no’s,” it didn’t come from so much the plantation. It came from like our moms and dads, saying, “Don’t do this,” or, “Don’t do that,” or, “Don’t go there.” There weren’t that many places, but a couple of things that I recall I got kind of involved in and I got really scolded for. One was—Lāna‘i had what’s called these drainage ponds. You know, there were these low parts of the plantation out in the pineapple fields that were created so that if there was heavy rains, water would collect in a pond. One of them, the largest one, which we called, “Mississippi,” wasn’t that far away from the town itself. It was made only about a quarter of a mile away, out in the pineapple field, below Fraser Avenue. The local kids in the neighborhood—after heavy rain, the place would fill up—and they would go and swim in it, this muddy water. But my dad always said, “Don’t go in there.” There was a lot of wisdom in that, when you think about it, right? The plantation used a lot of pesticides—that’s some heavy-duty bad stuff, so. . . .

WN: How deep was it?

DH: I think the deepest side, I’m pretty sure it got to about six feet or so, so you could drown. But nobody ever did. Once. I went in there, and I guess I must’ve been in intermediate or maybe upper-elementary or something. But I did it only once, just the fear of my dad ever finding out, you know.

Another thing that we did was, when they plowed the old pineapple fields, and the tractor was going around and disking the fields. So they would cut down all of the pineapple plants before it was disked into the soil. There were a lot of field rats or field mice that would run out when the tractor goes around. And so, we, as the neighborhood kids, would go out there with these long sticks or big sticks and wait for the rats to come out. We would pounce on them and kill them. Following this tractor that's going around, now. But definitely, it was something that was frowned on, and I'm sure the company was—it was not something that they would encourage. If they knew we were doing that, then they would probably come and stop us from doing it. But my dad who was a tractor operator, said, "You don't do something like that. That's dangerous." (Chuckles) You know, hanging around a moving piece of equipment that was plowing pineapple plants into the ground. But it was a lot of fun, you know, the rats that would run out of the fields because its home is being plowed. So we're out there and start hitting these rats or field mice. See, but that's some of the exciting kind of things that even when I mention it to my wife, she said, "What?"

(Laughter)

I think it's only a Lānaʻi thing, again.

(Laughter)

WN: I guess so, I never heard of that before. What other restrictions—well, what restrictions did the plantation have on you folks going into the pineapple field? Like did you guys eat pineapple?

DH: Yeah. There was very little [restriction], and that's why, I thought, you know, we as people growing up on Lānaʻi, thought that we were really fortunate that those kinds of rules were never imposed on us—on the Lānaʻi people. We could actually go into the fields, eat pineapples, or even, we could go in and pick a lot of pineapples. Box it, I mean, for family consumption. When we would fly to a neighbor island, we would take a box and share it with friends, you know. This was not something that was discouraged, or this was not something that the pineapple plantation said you can't do. Yet, we heard where, "No, you can't do this at the Wahiawā plantation," or any other plantation. But for Lānaʻi, it was okay. That was part of the benefits of living on Lānaʻi, growing up in the Lānaʻi community. The kind of relationship that we must've had with management—with the company itself. That we could actually drive our vehicles into the fields, pick pineapples, bring it home, and take a box of pineapples or two, you know, to the neighbor islands. So it was kind of neat . . .

WN: So what were your relationships with upper management, if any?

DH: Personal ones. I guess that's another part of my life; I guess, when I became older and returned—after college—to Lānaʻi as a working professional. I don't think it was any different from the kind of relationship that my parents or their generation had with management, which was very normal. (Chuckles) Very cordial, very friendly. I mean, they were part of our neighbors. They were part of the Lānaʻi community, so there was not such a distinct dichotomy of management as opposed to the laboring employees. Not that I can recall, as I was growing up or as an adult, working in that community.

MK: You know, going go back to your youth—we just made a kind of jump to your adulthood, but we spoke about your unorganized recreational activities as a kid. In terms of organized recreation, what do you remember?

DH: Oh, that, I recall also, was somewhat full—extremely full, in fact. The organized part, whether it was community-sponsored, the plantation at that time was very definitely involved in the social life of the community. They had a [Lāna‘i] Community Welfare Association that was actually staffed by the pineapple company. They sponsored different kinds of activities. They sponsored like the Little League. They sponsored a Christmas celebration. They sponsored Aloha Week. They sponsored and published the community newspaper. So they were very much involved, again, in the social life of the community. Every church had their youth organizations. They would have their recreational activities, or social activities. I was with the [Lāna‘i] Hongwanji [Mission] Buddhist church. So we had our YBA [Young Buddhist Association]. We had our Sunday school. I think—which was quite unique—we also used to celebrate Christmas. I remember having goody bags on Christmas.

(Laughter)

WN: You mean, sponsored by the Buddhist church?

DH: Buddhist church. (Chuckles) You know, little kids got their little goody bags. So that’s kind of neat. Boy Scouts—my Boy Scout troop was sponsored by my Hongwanji, Explorer Scouts. The Catholic church had their own. The Mormon church had their own. So most of us were involved in scouting, church, community athletics—again, the baseball. Of course, school was a very important part of everyone’s social life, so it had its share of activities also. So yeah, things were always happening, and there were always things to be involved with and things to do.

WN: So basically, it was school, church, and company who were sponsoring one of these organized things for the youth.

DH: There was also a [Lāna‘i] Chamber of Commerce. The business community was also very much involved. In fact, the baseball team that I was involved with was sponsored by the local chamber of commerce—the merchants. My Red Sox team was chamber of commerce. Yankees was the Hongwanji. Indians was Lāna‘i Filipino Association. The Cubs, I believe, was the Lāna‘i Community [Welfare] Association, I think.

So all of this, the formalized social organizations—social, religious organizations—took some responsibility in being a part of the community activities. The wide range of community activities. So as a community growing up of, say, maybe two-and-a-half to three thousand people, there was, I thought, a very full participation by all of these groups and organizations. Everyone had opportunities to participate. I can’t recall if there was any kind of sense that one didn’t belong someplace. Although there was a sense that, yeah, the Japanese were the Hongwanji, and the Filipinos were, you know, in the Filipino Association. That kind of thing, yeah.

MK: And then, like when you had all those different Little League baseball teams, where’d you folks play?

DH: There was a baseball park. There was a nice Little League baseball park that was built for such a purpose. It was great. I mean, no different, I guess, from any other community. We had our ball games on Sundays. Four teams, so we had two games. After every game, again, right, I guess we were a part of a baseball family event. So, after every game, you had your drinks and your cookies and your chips and all the good stuff to eat. I don’t know if we liked playing the game or if we liked what happened after the game, but (MK chuckles) that was really a big part of growing up—baseball season. Summertime.

MK: And then, when it wasn't baseball season, were you participating in other sports?

DH: No, baseball was baseball. See, I guess there was some limitation, in terms—because Lānaʻi was such a small community, we didn't have soccer. Soccer came way after. In fact, soccer for Lānaʻi probably came maybe within the last ten years or fifteen years. No football. We were much too small for football. Basketball was mainly for, I guess, the older kids in high school and older. Baseball was a very significant sport, I guess. That was probably the only one that took you from early childhood, up through high school. The community league was Little League baseball, Pony League—in fact, I was on the last Pony League team. So you really never had much of an opportunity to have much competition. So I guess, I recall maybe going to an outer island and playing a game. But we were the last Pony League team. Then, after Pony League, it was called a Senior League. That was any adults. By then, it was kind of open. But once you get to high school, it's your interscholastic varsity team.

WN: So the actual league itself was run by the community association.

DH: Yeah.

WN: And then, the different—the churches and other organizations . . .

DH: Would sponsor teams, yes, yes.

WN: So how did you choose what team you were going to play for? I mean, was it a selection or did someone find you?

DH: It's a selection, yeah. It's a draft.

WN: Oh, okay.

DH: Yeah. Similar to what they have over here.

WN: So you were a member of the Hongwanji [church], but you weren't on the Hongwanji team.

DH: Right.

WN: Because you weren't drafted by the Hongwanji? (Chuckles)

DH: Apparently.

(Laughter)

Maybe because I was Down Camp, I don't know. (Laughs)

WN: And, you know, it seems as though the company was almost like the government on Lānaʻi. You know, I mean, you folks were part of Maui County, but the actual governance of the island seems to be the company. Is that accurate?

DH: Again, in my experiences there, I never really felt that the company itself was that much of a government in regards to setting up the rules or the goings-on of the community itself, in terms of regulating what people could or could not do. It was, again, a very comfortable kind of situation. I think because people always had a sense that they were part of the union also, which played a very important part of everybody's lives. The sense that you would be taken care of, that people

would not go needy or would not be taken advantage of, because the union was always a very strong part of people's lives.

WN: Yeah, I forgot to ask about the union, in terms of sponsoring teams and things like that.

DH: No, no, they weren't.

WN: No?

DH: Yeah.

WN: And so, the police and the fire were all [Maui] County?

DH: Yes, yes. Well, the fire was not. There was no county fire department. So I believe that the fire was [run by the] pineapple company. When I moved back to Lāna'i to work at the school, I was recruited to join the Lāna'i volunteer firemen, which I had never heard of before. (WN and MK chuckle.) But everybody said, "You got to join, you got to join."

"Okay, I'll join."

So I became a member of the Lāna'i volunteer firemen, which was just as much of a social group as it was, really, a trained firefighting group. (WN chuckles.) We would respond to fire calls. I mean, there could be a brushfire at one o'clock in the morning, and the alarm goes off. You get out there to the fire station where the fire truck is. If you didn't make it in time, then you jump in your own vehicle, and you follow the fire truck, or you go where the fire is. Then, you actually go and put out a fire. So there were fires that we put out.

WN: Now, you mentioned the Christmas goodies that you got (DH chuckles) from Hongwanji and things like that. What other kinds of celebrations did you folks have for the community?

DH: (Pause.) I can't recall that much, but Christmas was a pretty big thing. Some kind of a community Christmas pageant. I don't recall much if there was really an Aloha Week pageant when I was growing up, but definitely Christmas. No Easter. I think, pretty much . . .

WN: What about *O-bon*?

DH: Oh, *O-bon*—yeah, but that's [Buddhist] church sponsored.

WN: Right, right.

DH: Yes, for the church itself. But it was kind of a big celebration that involved almost all the town because not only was there the dancing, but there were food booths that were set up by the Hongwanji. That was extremely popular. I mean, you know, the whole town would come out to partake of the food booths or the whatever, they sold.

Oh, what was really big in those days also were carnivals. Hongwanji sponsored a carnival, the Catholic church also—a large one. These carnivals, when they were held, would be for an entire weekend. So, these were wonderful things for us, as kids growing up. The Catholic church one was really the bigger one. They had, at one time, a Ferris wheel. E. K. Fernandez would come and set up a Ferris wheel. There was even a roller coaster. You know, some kind of a small version of a roller coaster. But the most popular things were always the food booths. The community

association may have sponsored one also, but by the time that we got to high school, these activities were already dying out. The carnivals. In fact, the local YBA hall was the staging area for the carnival, the Hongwanji carnival. That's where, maybe the week before, all the ladies would come together, and they would start prepping, you know, whatever they were going to be doing. A lot of the equipment for the carnival itself was stored there, at the local YBA hall, which was just a house or two away from where I grew up. That was where the Japanese[-language] school was held. That was where we practiced aikido also, but anyway, they had a large storage area in there where they had all of these carnival things that were stored.

After the carnival died out—years and years after—and this was well into, I guess, my adulthood, when they finally decided that they were going to turn over the building back to the company itself. It was just kind of sitting there. Some local committee members had then kind of used it as a weight-training area. Somebody had moved in some barbells and stuff. That was also in my high school days—was used as our aikido hall. But what was really neat was that they still had all of those carnival things that were still stored in there. I recall that when they were going to be moving all of these things to trash, I was a part of that. You know, I salvaged the old shaved-ice machine. (WN laughs.) I salvaged the old cotton-candy machine also. As the YBA person, we were in charge of cotton candy, so I was very familiar with that machine. I'm not certain if it still works, but it's in my garage today.

WN: No kidding.

DH: I have this old cast-aluminum shaved-ice machine and the cotton-candy machine in my garage. Maybe it works, maybe it doesn't. (WN chuckles.) But I salvaged, also, two pie safes.

WN: Two what?

DH: Two pie safes that were made by plantation carpenters probably.

MK: Wow.

DH: And I have those two in my house. One in my kitchen. The other one, I use in my bathroom as my towel shelves. But those are really neat stuff, yeah. Most of the other things, by the time that we were discarding or going through, were just too old, so we had to dump a lot of stuff.

WN: I've never heard that term, "pie safe" before. I've heard "safe" but . . .

DH: Yeah.

WN: "Pie safe" means they stored pies in there?

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

DH: I guess, I mean, because the original design was, really, a Mainland-New England thing, probably, yeah.

MK: You know, you just mentioned that you did aikido. So what other kind of Japanese-type activities did you get involved in? Like aikido is a Japanese martial art. . . .

DH: There really wasn't that much on the island itself. Lāna'i was, I guess, just as much a Filipino community as it was a Japanese community. The Japanese[-language] school was something that

was really an important part of many of the kids of my generation. Well, my age group or a little older. Again, the Hongwanji sponsored the Japanese[-language] school because the minister was the one that taught the Japanese[-language] school, and this was being taught at the YBA hall, which was just in back of my own home. My sisters attended Japanese[-language] school, and many of the people who—the kids growing up who went to the Hongwanji, the Japanese kids—attended the Japanese[-language] school. So this was every day after school. So every day after school, the YBA hall, the Japanese[-language] school area was like the big social gathering area because the kids from the school would, then, all be going to the Japanese[-language] school. I was a little kid. I wasn't involved in Japanese[-language] school, but I would kind of go over, and there would be marble games going on, and all kinds of socializing that the local kids—local Japanese kids—would be involved with. When I was of age—I guess when my parents decided, “Oh, time for you to go to Japanese[-language] school.” I wasn't too excited about going as a student. You know, I didn't mind being there as a . . . But my only recollection was that I went there for one day, I sat in there, and because the minister was not an English-speaking minister, I couldn't understand anything the person said. So when I came home, I complained to my parents. I said, “Hey, I'm not learning anything because I can't even understand the teacher.”

So they said, “Okay.”

It was very easy for me not to go to Japanese[-language] school. But my two sisters continued.

WN: Well, you had nice parents. (MK laughs.)

DH: So, practical.

(Laughter)

MK: Yeah. Going back to something you said earlier. You know, you would have these events, and there would be food booths, you know, as a real attraction, yeah?

DH: Yes.

MK: What kinds of food were served?

DH: I think, probably the most popular at the Hongwanji was the sushi. Because sushi—this *maki* sushi—very popular amongst the Filipino community, especially. They loved it. Doughnuts. Actually, doughnuts cooked in woks. Delicious, fresh, deep-fried doughnuts coming out of the wok.

WN: With the hole in it, or was it . . .

DH: Yes, with the hole in it. Teriyaki sticks, *chow fun*. . . Oh, hot dogs. (Chuckles)

WN: *Saimin*?

DH: *Saimin*.

WN: Pretty much it.

DH: Pretty much, I think. Yeah.

MK: How about with people hunting on Lāna'i, were there any . . .

DH: No, no. None of that game thing.

MK: None?

DH: Yeah.

WN: And of course, shaved ice.

DH: Oh yeah, shaved ice and cotton candy.

MK: Cotton candy.

WN: So they actually had cotton candy at the *Bon* dances? Or was this for the carnivals?

DH: Both.

WN: Oh yeah? Wow, that's pretty good.

DH: Shaved ice and cotton candy was there at both.

WN: You know, we're done with the second tape. I was wondering, you know, what we do is we usually do two sessions with each person, and we're wondering if we can do this again another time to continue. The advantage of doing it twice is that you can think about things that you didn't talk about, you know, your small-kid time, and (DH chuckles) then you can recall it the next time. Would that be okay?

DH: Sure.

WN: Okay.

DH: I'm retired. (Laughs)

MK: Retired people are busy!

WN: Retired person who travels a lot, though, this guy. (DH laughs.) Okay, so we'll end right here.

DH: Okay.

MK: Okay, yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 56-21-2-11, 56-22-2-11, and 56-23-2-11

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Dennis Hokama (DH)

Honolulu, O‘ahu

November 4, 2011

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

WN: Okay, today is November 4, 2011. We’re interviewing Dennis Hokama for the Lāna‘i oral history project. Interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama Nishimoto. This is session number two, tape number one.

MK: Okay, last time, you know, we were still talking about your childhood in Lāna‘i. And we just want to pick up a little bit more information about that time period. So go back to your childhood and think about what you remember most about family at that time. What did you folks do? Or what were your thoughts about family?

DH: I think a large part of this experience of Lāna‘i that I think many of my generation would consider to be the idyllic time of our lives was that the social institutions that we were very familiar with—family, religion, education—were all such significant or important parts of our lives. Family, in particular—families were extremely strong. I can remember early in the 1950s, when not everyone had televisions. My grandmother on my father’s side lived with my Uncle Shiro, and my cousin Geri (Geraldine), it was sort of the home where, during the weekends, the other Hokama family [members] would come. This was to watch television. They would bring different kinds of snacks for the families to enjoy. But the opportunity to come together as family were many—just to watch television.

New Year’s was an extremely important celebration. I mean, the New Year’s parties—and again, I think, many of our New Year’s parties, if not most of them, at that time were held at my grandmother’s place—my Uncle Shiro’s home with cousin Geri. These were parties that lasted all day—all New Year’s, from the morning to the evening.

So families were extremely powerful elements of this common experience that everyone, I believe, had on Lāna‘i, growing up there at this time. I think this is what is so unique about Lāna‘i. A large part of it, of course, is its isolation. I guess, through this isolation, the dependency upon one another—the social institutions provided tremendous opportunities for people to come together, such as family.

The churches—everybody belonged to one church or another. A small community such as Lāna‘i, with about 2,500 people. When I was growing up, there were, let’s see, the Buddhist church, the Catholic church, the [Lāna‘i] Union Church, the Mormon church, the Baptist church—I’m sure there may have been a couple of others. But everyone went to church. The church had very vibrant, viable, active congregations. Churches sponsored Little League teams. Churches

sponsored their youth organizations for the young kids—teenagers—to participate in different kinds of social, religious events. Churches sponsored carnivals. School—everybody went to the same school. One school—Lāna‘i High and Elementary School—K to 12.

WN: Were the churches ethnically divided at all? I mean, not divided, but you know what I mean, the Japanese more tend to go to the Buddhist church and so forth?

DH: The Japanese, more than likely, in the Buddhist church. But there were many also in the Catholic church. Many of the Filipino families, Catholic church, but they were somewhat a little bit more mixed. The Mormon church was mixed. The Baptist church was mixed. So you know, it was somewhat integrated, but I guess for the Buddhist church in particular, I think, was probably more, as I recall, just the Japanese population that attended.

MK: You know, you were talking about family. And I’m just curious, how big was your family? You know, as you think about the ones on Lāna‘i.

DH: Oh, the Hokama side, consisted of the four brothers, including my dad. Eisuke was the oldest, and my father [Eiso], Shiro, and Goro. Each one of these had families of their own. My uncle Eisuke had five, I believe, in their family—four girls and one boy. Uncle Shiro had just one girl. Goro had a boy and a girl. My own family, I had two older sisters and myself. So extremely close, even though Shiro and my dad lived Down Camp, and Eisuke and Goro were Up Camp. (DH and MK laugh.)

MK: How much of a distance is that, Up Camp and Down Camp?

DH: I’d say, at its extreme points, I’d say maybe about a mile, diagonally. (Chuckles)

MK: And then, you know, you spoke about the school-sponsored events, the churches sponsored events, you had family events. . . . I was wondering, how about stores? What was their involvement in the community?

DH: I guess the stores’ involvement were part of the chamber of commerce—the business people. Their support for Lāna‘i Community [Welfare] Association events. So the company itself—I guess, the change from the very early days of a more oppressive plantation period evolved into a time when the plantation felt the need to be much more benevolent. A much more positive participant in the community, in terms of providing opportunities for social events, opportunities for youth to develop athletically, supporting the schools educationally. So the businesses themselves would be strong supporters, relative to maybe financial sponsorship of various events that the community association would initiate.

MK: And then, you know, up till now, the portrayal that you’ve given us is one of, you know, like togetherness and belonging. You know, people had organizations or entities to belong to—belong to a church, or belong to a family group—and there’s a sense of togetherness and cooperation. I was wondering, in your experiences, were there instances of conflict? Not getting together and getting along?

DH: The most common experience, I believe, of my generation and my peers growing up was the absence of any significant conflicts. The conflict that’s talked about, and for some of us, vaguely had some experiences of, was like the 1951 strike. As I indicated earlier, my experiences were not negative, in the sense that I guess I was too young to experience the stresses of a conflict, but

more the positive experiences of someone being able to socialize with his friends during an extended summer period.

So those kinds of conflicts were things that we would hear about from our parents—others of that generation who had to go through that. Significant conflicts or conflicts arose somewhat after, in the 1970s, as the plantation began to wane. The global economic picture changed and impacted Hawai‘i also. Pineapple no longer became as viable. And so, the challenge of maintaining a plantation or entering into some other kind of economic activity, that always poses some significant conflict situations for communities such as Lāna‘i.

So my experiences, which were extremely positive, had much to do because of the very positive common experiences that I think all of us had at that time, and which contributed to, I think, the uniqueness of Lāna‘i. I think what really strengthens communities is their exposure to these kinds of common experiences. You know, most, I think, small communities are strong because of their relative isolation and their need to support one another. Lāna‘i is unique in a sense that it’s a one-island community. So, you know, the dependency upon everyone else is a lot greater, but I think what is stronger than just the dependency is just our own common experiences, you know. The common experiences of our parents, and then as we grew up, it was, I believe, a significantly middle-class type of community. We may have been poor, but no one considered themselves poor. So in that respect, I guess I would say, we were all middle-class. We all considered ourselves the same.

WN: You guys were all in the same boat.

DH: We were all in the same boat. There were no significant distinctions about the rich people or the poor people. I mean, I’m not aware of any poor people, you know. We may have considered the *haole* managers who lived up in *Haole* Camp, maybe, more wealthy, but everybody went to the same school. There was no one group going to a private school, a Punahou or an ‘Iolani. I mean, everybody went to Lāna‘i High and Elementary School.

WN: So there weren’t instances of some of the *haole* managers’ kids coming over here to Punahou? You remember them as being classmates.

DH: Yes, if they had kids, they were, by and large, members of the student body, like everyone else. You know, so people socialized with one another. People did things together. So that kind of common experiences that people had and were experiencing themselves really created, I think, a very, very strong community.

WN: Why don’t you just go back—you’re talking about the all-day New Year’s thing. Continue to describe that.

DH: Wow. I always considered New Year’s, I guess, my favorite celebration because it was an all-day kind of an event. Well, maybe not all that pleasant early because the thing that we had to do first was clean the house.

(Laughter)

Clean the house, clean the windows—I mean, the house had to be clean. It’s not that we cleaned the house only once a year, but that once-a-year cleaning was really a special one. You know, so it had to be somewhat immaculate. The windows needed to be cleaned and everything. But after that, the families would—the individual Hokama families would cook. You know, the sushi, the

shōyu pork, the fried chicken, all the favorites—sashimi, tempura—all the good stuff. All those things would be brought to Grandma's house. It was an open-house kind of thing. Invites were sent out verbally, I guess. "Come on over, this is New Year's," you know, "Have lunch," and all day.

(Laughter)

DH: Lunch, dinner.

WN: Did you guys pound *mochi*?

DH: No, we did not. I guess ours was more Okinawan style. Lots of drink. Lots of—oh, soda. I mean, you don't get to drink soda all the time, but of course, special occasions, parties—soda. Of course the men had their beer and all the kind of hard liquor, and that was powerful drinking in those days. (WN and MK chuckle.) That was one of those opportunities when, you know, people drank from morning to early the next morning.

(Laughter)

WN: The things like the pork and the fish and the beef and so forth, were they fresh-caught or were they bought?

DH: No, I'd say most of them were bought. Fish were probably caught—fresh-caught, yeah. So that was great. Living on Lāna'i was always fresh fish. In fact, enough sashimi that growing up, I took sashimi for granted. You know, I truly missed it as I grew older and recognized that fish prices outside was so much higher.

WN: (Chuckles) Did you do fireworks?

DH: Oh, fireworks. Very early on, that was really the most fun part about New Year's. But Maui County passed an ordinance very, very early—I believe when I was still in elementary school—banning fireworks. So Maui County had its ordinance in the 1950s already banning fireworks.

WN: Wow, way ahead of the time, huh. (Chuckles)

DH: Yeah, way ahead. But prior to that, playing with firecrackers was the absolute most fun thing to do. But we never had those—you know the Chinese style where you had a pole, and you had those firecrackers? It was none of that kind. Our fireworks was just playing with the individual ones. You know, (WN chuckles) throwing it with a string, cotton string. You light the end and light the firecrackers. Or if you were a little older, then you had a piece of rope, and you burned that. So you had a, you know, better whatever-you-call-it [fuse] to light the firecrackers.

WN: Did we ask about Christmas?

MK: I don't think so.

WN: What was Christmas like?

DH: Oh, it started with Christmas. Christmas was a—of course, every kid loves Christmas. I mean, prior to Christmas, maybe even months before Christmas—Lāna'i doesn't have large department stores, so many of the things that we would consider to be very special toys or those kinds of

things would be found in catalogs. Sears catalog, JC Penney's? God, I can't recall all the different kinds of catalogs that we had that somehow appeared. But we would go through these catalogs to look at the kinds of Christmas toys that we wished Santa would bring us. (Chuckles)

But yes, special things would probably be purchased through catalogs. But Christmas day, like any other place, the kids would get up very early in the morning. You'd have your Christmas trees, presents under the Christmas trees, and getting up and being very excited about opening Christmas presents.

WN: Did the plantation management do anything?

DH: Plantation management would have some kind of a Christmas pageant or big Christmas gathering where there'd be a program, there'd be a Santa Claus. Then, at the end of the program, Santa Claus would distribute Christmas stockings, filled with apples, oranges, Christmas candy, nuts—and this is for the entire community. So again, a very special occasion, which was celebrated by all the churches, including the Buddhist church to a small extent. (Laughs) But yeah, the entire community. Christmas, of course, then led into New Year's. So it was just a phenomenal period of time growing up.

WN: You know, you mentioned—you know, what you wrote in the email and then you had forgotten what you'd wrote, and I sent it to you, right? About what you wrote—about the "Golden Age" of Lāna'i.

DH: Oh, yeah.

WN: You know, I just wanted to ask you, you know, just talk about it. This is what you wrote, you said, "The Golden Age period is very significant to the identity of Lāna'i as a community because it would seem, to those who grew up during that period, that life was near idyllic," . . .

DH: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: . . . which is what you've been talking about.

DH: Yeah.

WN: "There were no significant vestiges of a paternalistic plantation system. Rather, there appeared to be a coalition of labor and management, working to provide for the social and economic well-being of the entire community."

DH: Mm-hmm [yes]. This was, as I indicated earlier, as far as my experience growing—I'm quite certain my peers at that time—was quite similar. Our growing-up experience was just filled with good things about what we had experienced with family—the opportunities for family to get together to do a lot of the fun kind of things that families do—having parties and celebrations. Many, if not every one of us, belonged to a church and belonged to various organizations within the church, which also provided social opportunities. Opportunities to be with our friends. School was just a magnificent place. I mean, of course, you had to work somewhat in school, but it brought everybody together again. You know? You never heard about truancy—people not going to school. It was very difficult not to go to school because being such a small community, everybody would know if you didn't come to school. That's not a good thing, so really, everybody was in school. I'm not certain why people would not want to be going to school because school was such a great place to be. You know, this is all part of, again, like the

elementary school experience, which was, I think for most people, where family is intact. Families are strong supporters of the school. Generally speaking, the experiences of the children in school would be very positive also.

Because again, I guess the last vestiges of real plantation domination by the employer was pretty much essentially erased by the time of the '51 strike or so. You know, and when Lānaʻi decided that, no, we weren't going to settle for a contract that was agreed to by union leadership and the other plantations—at that time, plantations had to do it alone. You know, they were not making decisions for all the other plantations. Lānaʻi decided that, no, we weren't going to settle, even if it was a paltry few cents, but that there was a more important need to be recognized as a serious community of union members, working hard for a plantation that was dependent upon its people. I believe, even though it was an economic loss for every member that participated—seven months beyond when the strike was originally settled by others—I believe what was established, in terms of recognition that they were people that saw tremendous value in this community and wanted this community to be a strong, viable community that supported everyone and wasn't going to be subject to things that they felt was unfair with the company. So they stuck together, and they held out. I think they were the big winners. I think that established something—a tremendous amount of pride. I'm certain that, from the other side, a tremendous amount of respect, which created the kind of community that I'm talking about, where all of us growing up felt safe, secure, well provided for. Everyone, I think, has such great memories about that.

WN: About the time you were growing up—you know, the '50s and the '60s, and you called it a sort of “Golden Age.” And this is after this really big, traumatic strike of 1951. It seems like your positive experiences are linked to good relations between the workers and management. Because if there were conflicts, you probably would've felt it.

DH: Yeah, and I strongly believe that, well after that strike—and I'm not so certain that it wasn't existing already at that particular time, maybe late '40s, early '50s—that there was this closeness between many of the middle management and the general employees of the plantation. Because these were people that lived together in this community, that lived and worked together, whether they were management or whether they were employees. But I think that the combination of the '51 strike, I think, solidified the feeling that, “Hey, we're all in this together, whether we're middle management or whether we're [laborers]. We'll continue to work and play together.” The ethnic diversity of middle management was just as much as the blue-collar employees. So these were the same people. These were the same people whose kids we were playing with or who our parents were drinking beer with and partying with. So, you know.

WN: Right. So it seems as though the signs of Lānaʻi and the isolation of Lānaʻi helped to keep the relations strong.

DH: I believe that. I think that is very special to the uniqueness of Lānaʻi. That whether one was in management or one was a blue-collar laborer in the fields, each one of us felt that for the most part, we were on Lānaʻi because we liked being on Lānaʻi. I think early on, you know, when we were talking about the 1930s and the 1940s, where many of the immigrants and in-migrants from the other islands came to Lānaʻi, it was just a place to work. Employment provided an opportunity to survive. Later on, as these families established their families, and their kids were growing up there, I think there was a strong sense that Lānaʻi was already a very special place. Because I recall my parents had no great thoughts or aspirations about either going to a Las Vegas or going to Honolulu or going to Maui to have a good time. In fact, the discussion was always, you know: I don't want to go to someplace where I need to contend with traffic, or I need to contend with the other things that a big city provides. But living on Lānaʻi is such a nice,

comfortable, quiet existence. For those people who live on Lānaʻi, that's the values that they see there.

WN: And from the perspective of Honolulu, in my time, the perception of Lānaʻi was a place that you can go to work during the summer, okay. There were a lot of young people who would come to Lānaʻi in the summer to work in the pineapple fields. What was that like?

DH: I think that period of time was later, in the late '60s, early '70s, when the plantation recognized that it was more difficult to get local people to work in the pineapple fields, that they needed to go get laborers from the outside.

WN: Now did you work in the fields?

DH: Yes, I did. This was a . . .

WN: What kind of work did you do?

DH: I did just about everything. This was another of the, I think, the more positive experiences that every Lānaʻi person growing up there went through. As hard as working in pineapple fields may have been, it also provided a tremendous positive experience because we were doing it with all of our friends. We were doing it with our classmates. Our working gang was our classmates. So, we were out there very early in the morning—if it was a day shift—we were out there very early in the morning, working all day, coming back late in the afternoon. But it was, again, working and eating with our friends out there.

If it was a night shift, it was the same thing. You know, you're going out there in the early afternoon and working in the fields at night. The nice thing about it—working night shifts—was that the girls who worked in the day shift would bring out coffee and cocoa and sodas, cookies, and little treats during our dinner time out there. You know, so it was really a nice time, and we, in return, would—if we were working night shifts and the girls' gangs were working in a day shift—we would bring out the sodas and the treats and those kinds of things during their lunch time out in the fields. So when they were having their lunch, we would bring out these treats.

So there was this kind of camaraderie that was just a large part of working out in the fields that made it really positive. So many of us, as we turned sixteen, that was our first opportunity to work. So we may have done *hō hana* work, which was weeding. We all looked forward to being able to pick pineapples, until we actually picked pineapples and found out how hard it was. (MK laughs.)

WN: This is with the harvester [i.e., boom harvester machine]?

DH: Yeah, that's with the harvester.

WN: So what was your technique in picking pineapple?

DH: Well, picking pineapple is taking the fruit off of the pineapple plant, twisting off the crown and putting the fruit in the conveyer belt. That is the basic picking pineapple. But it was very difficult to be able to go through all those steps and be able to keep up with that conveyer belt, which was on top of a truck that was moving. So in order to really do it fast, one had to grab the fruit—which was on the plant—by the crown, yank it off the plant, and then, holding the crown with the fruit facing the boom, and you'd just do a little twist, and the fruit just falls right off [from the

crown]. So it was a significant technique that took a little bit of time to develop this so-called “flipping” technique.

WN: Did you hit the boom at all, or it was just . . .

DH: No, hitting the boom is kind of a no-no because if you hit the boom like this, then you may damage the fruit. So that was something that was frowned upon. But for some people who had a hard time keeping up, they have had to do that, you know, because doing the flipping of the pineapple by holding the crown and doing this little flip so the pineapple just falls off, required some wrist strength and a little bit of timing. It’s kind of a technique that a big, hefty, strong guy would not be able to do just by brute strength. It requires a technique over time.

WN: And so did you do two hands? Two . . .

DH: Yeah, if there was two pineapples, you would have to go in with two hands.

WN: And you were assigned a line?

DH: Yes.

WN: One person per line.

DH: Yes.

WN: And you would be walking along the moving boom, right?

DH: Yes. Okay.

WN: So what happens if someone starts to fall behind? What do they do?

DH: Then, the person next to him might help him. Yeah, so this is a large part of the camaraderie of working out in the fields. If someone needed more help because he may have more pineapples in his line, the guy next to him would help. So everybody expected that.

WN: And did the girls do the same picking?

DH: Girls did the same thing also, yes. So you know, again, as hard work as it was, it was somewhat fun. It was dirty, sweaty, hot. But you were out there doing it with your friends. You were earning money.

WN: Did they speed up at all?

DH: They did. And there was this bonus system also. Every field was calculated to be able to produce so many trucks of fruit in a day’s work. Say, for example, if the calculation was you folks should be able to do ten truck[load]s, you know, in a day’s work. If you did eleven, that eleventh truck is a bonus. So you’d get an incentive—you’d get an extra amount of pay for picking an additional amount of pineapples beyond what was the quota for that field. So the faster the truck went, the more opportunities you had to make this extra money. But that’s hard work. Some really enjoyed the competitiveness of being the one that picked the most pineapples or made the most bonus. Others were more content with just doing a day’s work because a day’s work was plenty hard enough.

WN: (Chuckles) And where were you in all this? I mean, in terms of being competitive and . . .

DH: Well, we were in the middle. (MK laughs.) We're middling. Sometimes, we're more energized and we wanted to be a little bit more competitive. Other times, we just said, "I think this is a little too difficult today. It's a little hot."

(Laughter)

You know. But a great opportunity for the young people growing up—school-aged kids—to be able to have a summer job. For many of us who, after graduation from high school and coming out here to the university [University of Hawai'i at Mānoa]. . . . Summer school was really not that much of an option also because most of us needed to work to pay for education. So summertime, we went back and worked for the company, which was really good. But by then, many of us who had had the experience of doing some of the more laboring kinds of jobs, were being offered higher level jobs. So some of us were also offered foreman jobs. In fact, we supervised gangs, or we did other kinds of work that was not picking the pineapple or out there working the fields. Some of us would be doing more of the clerical work in the office. I, myself, in college, did this *luna*-type work, supervising a gang. Then I was asked to do what was called a "field auditing" job also, which was also a supervisory job. I would do timekeeping. Another summer, I was hired to supervise some of these—you know, these neighbor island kids. So I was hired to run the recreation program for the kids that came in during the summer. That was also a higher level supervisory position. So for some of us who elected to come back and work during the summers in between our time at the university, we were offered some pretty nice jobs with the company.

Unfortunately, today, the kids don't have that same kind of opportunity of having ready summer work available to them. So that really takes away from some of the family income. My daughter was vehemently against working in a pineapple field. But then again, by the time she was of age, there was no plantation. But I recall, she would—when she was a little girl, understanding that all children or all kids growing up on Lāna'i would eventually work in the pineapple fields, she was hoarding her coins so that she wouldn't have to work in a pineapple field.

(Laughter)

WN: Well, she's basically Honolulu girl, right?

DH: No. (Laughs) Oh, she was, yeah.

MK: You know, going back to your younger kid days, you know, you mentioned that people liked school on Lāna'i. Tell us about your days in elementary school.

END OF TAPE NO. 56-21-2-11

TAPE NO. 56-22-2-11

WN: Okay, this is session two, tape two, with Dennis Hokama on November 4, 2011.

MK: Okay, we were just asking you about your school days, and I just want to know some of your remembrances of going to school on Lāna'i.

DH: School was a very neat place to be at, especially in elementary school. You know, when you still didn't really have the strong academic stresses. I mean, there was a pressure to do well. Anyone had to do well because Mom and Dad were always on your case to make certain that you do well. But aside from getting up early, which no kid likes to do, school itself, being there at school was an extremely positive experience because, again, it's being with all of your peers. Every grade level consisted of two classes because there was anywhere between forty to fifty students in your grade level. So that was enough for two classes. So you pretty much were together with all of your friends, all of your peers. You know, being at school, everybody's together, morning recess, lunch, lunch recess. After school, you're still there on campus probably, playing with your friends. Every one of my elementary teachers were very significant people in our lives. They were almost as important as Mom and Dad, you know. The kind of rapport that we had with our teachers at that time was so significant. I mean, you know, there was no question that they genuinely had our interests at heart.

MK: You know, those elementary-school teachers, were they long-time residents of the island? Or had they come from elsewhere?

DH: Many of them came from elsewhere. There were several who were residents of Lānaʻi, but I would say, by and large, many came from elsewhere but I think most of them ended up staying and establishing families of their own on Lānaʻi, eventually, at that time. So I guess many of these people became entranced with living on Lānaʻi and sowing the same kinds of values. Or being able to recognize that there were certain very strong, positive experiences that they were having on Lānaʻi and decided to stay and raise their families there also.

MK: You know, those very positive feelings that you had about your elementary-school days, did those feelings carry over into your intermediate and high school years?

DH: I would say significantly because it was just part of this process of going to school—being at school. School was K to 12. You're at the same campus. Again, this is a very unique experience for Lānaʻi people that when you go to one school, and you're going to school for twelve years at the same—not twelve years, thirteen years because kindergarten was also on the same campus. Growing up there, and if you have brothers and sisters, everyone's at the same school, whether you're in elementary school or middle school or high school. Growing up there, it was very interesting to me that later on, as a professional teacher—as a professional educator—and the discussions about middle school and intermediate school being so significantly different from either elementary or high school because this is a transitional period and developmentally, the kids are very different, you know? I never really experienced that there was a difference because we were really never provided an opportunity to feel any different, I think, when we were growing up on Lānaʻi, going through that kind of a system. It's a K–12, you're either in elementary school, or you're in secondary school. The only difference is that in elementary, you didn't have to wear shoes. [Starting in] seventh grade, you wear shoes. But we never saw ourselves as seventh- or eighth-grader as being somebody who was allowed to be a little bit more rascal because older brothers and sisters were in high school, also. Younger brothers and sisters in elementary school, so you know, you can't look ridiculous if you're. . . .

(Laughter)

I don't know if that was a pressure of why, in my eyes, of middle school, when it is such a significant thing, you know, in other larger communities. But well, I think more significantly is that our parents were strong supporters of schools and education, and were always on top of us. So that's, I think, a large part of why there was very little delinquency, very little truancy. For

most, the experience of school was extremely positive. The teachers lived amongst everyone else in the community, so they were very much a part of everyone's family. So that all contributes to, I believe, for most, a very positive experience. I think for most people, going to college was just the next step. It's just an extension from kindergarten to first grade, up to seventh grade, twelfth grade. Now, you're going to continue on to—it was just the expectation. You know, it was that kind of community.

MK: So like, in your case, was it like a given that 100 percent of you folks would graduate?

DH: Oh, yes. (Laughs) Definitely. I think it's similar to—if you are of age, and you did not work in a pineapple field, something must be wrong with this individual. This individual must have some kind of illness that we're not aware of. You know, or some kind of a handicap or something. So everybody worked. Everybody's going to graduate. If you don't graduate, then there's something very unusual, very strange about this person. So there's something very strange about any real delinquent. (Chuckles) So you know, delinquency was very minimal, that I can recall.

WN: And what kinds of goals and aspirations did you have, starting in, say, high school. What did you want to be?

DH: Never really entertained too many thoughts about what I wanted to be. It was just—I'm just going to continue school. (Laughs)

WN: Were there any pressures or advice, saying, you know, "We want some of you to stay back and work in the pineapple industry," or anything like that?

DH: I would say the pressure was more than likely the opposite of that. That was, I think, a very unusual thing that, later in life, I saw in my mother when I decided, at an early point in my professional career, that I was going to go back to Lānaʻi. I felt a sense that she felt some disappointment that I had decided that I was going to come home and raise my family there on Lānaʻi. You know, it was . . .

WN: You mean, this was when you got transferred, or you took a job with Lānaʻi in '76? Was it . . .

DH: Yeah, in '76, right. I had started my teaching career at 'Aiea High School and had taught there for six years. But I had talked to my wife about eventually transferring to Lānaʻi [High and Elementary School]. When our daughter, at that time, was two years old, we both looked seriously at transferring back home to Lānaʻi. So, in 1976, we both came home to Lānaʻi. I think we may have been able to transfer earlier if there had been an opening in high school, but given, it was only one school, one secondary part of the school, and elementary. There was always elementary positions open somehow. So there was always a position open for my wife, but I had to wait until such time that there was a social studies teaching position open for me. So, in 1976, you know, there was an opportunity, and we both came over.

But then, you know, prior to that, when I had told my mom or my family that, "Hey, almost ready to come home and start teaching there," she didn't seem to be very happy. I mean, she didn't say, "Oh, why?" That kind of thing. But I could kind of sense that it seemed like she wasn't all that happy that I had decided to come back. I've never really asked her, but I always thought that—I think she felt that leaving Lānaʻi and making a life for yourself out there was what the young kids should be aspiring to do.

WN: Do you think that that was typical? I mean, . . .

- DH: I'm not certain that was typical, but I don't think that feeling lasted too long in her, though. I think she really enjoyed us being there and having my little daughter there to take care of also, so it was not something that became a problem. Not at all. But what was a little bit strange to me was that when I had indicated to her that it was time for me to come home, I didn't see any leaps of joy or anything like that (laughs).
- WN: Now you were there from '76, you started as a teacher. And then three years later, you became vice principal at Lānaʻi.
- DH: Yeah, that's correct.
- WN: So total, you were in Lānaʻi for like thirteen years, right? From '76 to '89 . . .
- DH: Eighty-nine, yes.
- WN: During that time—the '70s and the '80s—what kinds of changes did you notice in the community?
- DH: The first change that I noticed was, I guess, my first day in class with my students from Lānaʻi and going through the student roster and seeing that most of the names were not names that I could recognize as names that I grew up with. So this was a real experience for me. You know, something that I never really anticipated. I should have, but you know, I was more being a little bit more romantic, in terms of Lānaʻi hasn't changed. I was very nostalgic about coming back home to Lānaʻi and everything being the same. But looking at my classroom roster and seeing that most of those names were very different, you know.
- WN: Meaning that your peers' children or your peers had chosen to move away from Lānaʻi as well?
- DH: Yeah, most of the students that graduated from Lānaʻi do not return or did not return at that time. You know, there were few who did remain, but by and large, most did not. So again, looking at my student roster, most of them were not names that I recognized. Most of those names were children of immigrants or immigrants themselves, as students. A few Asian names. Most of the Asians were of mixed ancestry. So very few pure Asians. That was the first change that I noticed.
- WN: So in essence, these are like families that came after you left?
- DH: That's correct.
- MK: So in a decade's time, from the time you went to the university to your coming back to Lānaʻi, the demographics changed.
- DH: The demographics changed very significantly, yes.
- WN: What other changes? What about management or the pineapple industry itself?
- DH: The pineapple industry was, I guess, already going through some difficulties. Agriculture in Hawaiʻi was going through some difficulties, so there was talk floating around about the future of Lānaʻi and the possible tourist development on Lānaʻi. This was somewhat troubling to me because, again, most of it was nostalgic. That this would certainly mean a totally different kind of a lifestyle or experience that, I felt, was such a positive one for me growing up. But also, recognizing that for communities such as Lānaʻi, undergoing that kind of a change could be

extremely traumatic because it displaces people. It changes the physical environment. To a certain extent, by and large, it changes people's values from the needs of community—the sense of strong community and people—to the sense of providing service for economic gain. So yeah, it was an extremely troubling time for me. But also, I thought, it was a kind of an exciting time because Lānaʻi's undergoing a transition. I believe that people needed to understand what they were facing. That in order for people to participate and make decisions, people had to know what was going on. People had to be able to have a sense of what could or could not be. People need to have an opportunity to feel that there are options or they have choices. But those were the kinds of things that were very much absent in the community at that time. So the discussion of changes was, I guess, very minimal, other than that there were rumors of change that was going to be taking place.

MK: You know, as someone who had graduated from Lānaʻi High in the mid-'60s, returning as a teacher in '76, and continuing on as an administrator, you know, what kinds of changes did you notice in the school? You know, at your time, it was a place that kids want to be. It was a time when kids all graduated. How about your time as a teacher and administrator?

DH: You know, I—again, and I don't know if this is really strange, but I really enjoyed my time as a teacher and as an administrator—as a vice principal. One of the primary responsibilities of any vice principal—I think, the stereotypical vice principal—is one of disciplinarian. But I found that my job was not really as a disciplinarian because Lānaʻi was still not the kind of a place that kids were so undisciplined that they required discipline. I don't think that you can find a place where the kids are still the nicest kids. In fact, what I would tell people is that, “God, Lānaʻi has the nicest kids.” I mean, you know, when I'm talking about Lānaʻi students. But I think they're the laziest ones.

(Laughter)

You know, you really got to push and prod them to excel academically, but they were the nicest kids. So the difficulty of education on Lānaʻi was, I think, how do you provide the kind of motivation to students who may not necessarily see academics as being very important? (Laughs) I think, in our days, we felt that our parents just saw the natural extension of high school being college and then pushing their kids accordingly. Somehow, there was this change where I think parents did not find education to be any less important, but I think probably left education to the school, that [it became] the school's responsibility to provide the motivation and the reasons for why the students needed to excel. But the students, by and large, as I said, were not necessarily extra naughty. They might have been a little less motivated academically, but they were still the nicest kids. I just enjoyed working with those kids, which gave me many more opportunities to do other things than discipline, which was kind of neat.

I felt that I had a unique experience as a developing school administrator at a K to 12 school where I needed to develop the experience with students of all ages. You know, kindergarten to the twelfth grade. I had the experience of being involved in the curriculum of K to 12, and being involved with kids of that age. And not necessarily be so tied to discipline that I couldn't really function as an educator who also needed to be significantly involved in curriculum and other ways. In fact, I was like the producer at the school. Maybe my title at the school would be more of that of a producer because whenever there were any kind of special programs, [such as] if the university was going to be sending some special speaker . . .

(Telephone rings.)

... or someone to present some talk or demonstration of a cultural nature, then I would be the one responsible to coordinate and do all the arrangements. For any event—any large school event—I was the primary coordinator and arranger. I was the AV specialist. So you know, it was such a great hands-on experience that I was responsible for, that that was great. I mean, I thought I was going to be a lifelong vice principal on Lānaʻi. (Chuckles)

WN: Now in your position as vice principal—well, you know, it's obviously a leadership position in the community, right? You know, you grew up there and now you're in a position of leadership. You know, all of the things that were going on in the '70s, you know, starting with Dole Corporation changing and getting out of pineapple eventually and eventually leading to [David] Murdock's complete takeover. In essence, you were, at that time—'76 to '89—with all this transition, how did you deal with it in terms of your role as a leader in the community? I mean, were there cases where students were worried or their parents were worried about the future of Lānaʻi or anything like that?

DH: One of the, I think, essential issues that Lānaʻi and Lanaians have to really confront is that for the most part, much of what they need to do—I think all of us need to do—I still consider myself Lānaʻi—is understand that things change, that we all need to be active participants in this change, changes that will alter people's lifestyles, that will alter the environment. [It] requires the participation of everyone. A problem that I see that has been created to a certain extent by much of what I had said about the idyllic Golden Age—the great period of Lānaʻi, when people had just such a great sense of security and that times were really good—I think also developed a tremendous amount of complacency: that things were going to take care of themselves. Or, you know, the union won't let anything bad take place. Things have always worked out. So this kind of complacency, I think, can be very dangerous. I think this was also rampant, especially at that time, which was quite sad because I think that was one of the biggest changes that ever took place on Lānaʻi in its entire history. And yet, the complacency of the people, I think, did not allow for enough discussion about all of the elements of this kind of change and what kind of impact it would have on Lānaʻi.

So there were a few of us, and I think it was being raised in the kind of family that I was raised in. I was raised in a very strong union household. And my understanding was that the union was an advocate for the people. You know, not only for the workers, but also for its community. It was something that carried me through the university days during the anti-war movement and all of those things, which I participated in. It also took me to Lānaʻi before I transferred back to Lānaʻi to somewhat get a little bit more involved in trying to generate some discussion about the development.

I was a board member of Life of the Land at that time, in my early professional career also. So I went back to Lānaʻi and tried to interest some people about, you know, talking about the issue. Later, when I went back permanently as a teacher there, several of us came together and were able to apply for and receive a state grant to provide some educational discussions about Lānaʻi's future. So, we were able to bring in some speakers. We were able to start a newspaper—a community newspaper. So this allowed us to be able to give Lānaʻi community members an opportunity to talk about the issue of development and hopefully provide some options and some information to allow people to become more active participants.

WN: And how did some of the old-timers react to what you guys were trying to do?

DH: It's an interesting phenomenon because the union, at that time, was a proponent of the development because the union's interest was not only pineapple, but the union's intention was

also to make certain that its membership would continue to be viable, would continue to be supported. So, they saw their interests as supporting the development. They understood the economic situation with pineapple, and they recognized the need at that time to diversify the economy of Lānaʻi. Although some of us raised some skepticism about whether development would allow for diversification and would allow for the continuation of pineapple. I think history has shown that, yeah, both could not coexist. (Chuckles)

So for those of us who raised questions about the value of development, we may have been looked at with some skepticism. It's interesting because again, for those of us who were raised in union families and saw the union as being the primary advocates for our interests, that the union was one of the primary obstacles we saw at being able to really raise the consciousness of Lānaʻi people to be able to see both sides of the issue. You know, so it was tough going at that time, but again, somewhat exciting times. I think these kinds of pressures continue on a day-to-day basis. More so now because the economic stresses are even greater, and the continuing need to look at how do you keep a community like Lānaʻi viable? So it becomes that much more important for all Lānaʻi people to be that much more informed.

WN: The fact, too, that it became less of a local kind of an issue. You know, with Oceanic Properties, and Dole Foods, and Castle & Cooke, and some of these big corporations became more of a global kind of issue . . .

DH: Yes. It becomes that much more essential for the community to be more unified. I would say that the community needs to somehow be able to speak in one voice because the economic pressures are so intertwined with what is happening worldwide. Lānaʻi is such a small part of this universe, you know, that what little one person can do. (Chuckles) You know, a community of Lānaʻi which has 3,000 people today, and the talk of planting windmills [to produce electricity], which are primarily going to be servicing [communities] other than Lānaʻi. You know, it's people other than Lānaʻi making the decision that will significantly impact the entire island. [It] is going to require, I think, a tremendous amount of need for one voice to be able to speak. I'm not saying that windmills are not good. I think, if we look from a global perspective, windmills are great, and we may need more windmills. Windmills may be great for Hawaiʻi, and we need more windmills in Hawaiʻi. But I think Lānaians need to have a greater sense of what the benefits are for them to be making such a tremendous sacrifice.

WN: So you think there's less complacency and apathy now, as compared to in the '70s?

DH: I think, generally speaking, there may be less complacency, but there is, I think, a greater amount of disunity. I think there are more people who are very conscious of issues, but I think there is less of a clear, one-voice kind of thing.

WN: So it's more polarized now. I mean, there's probably as many people for as who are against the windmills.

DH: Or maybe there are in-betweens. (Laughs) You know, at one time, I guess, one could say, at least the union was able to create a one-voice of Lānaʻi's best interests. At one time, I believe, maybe a group like Lānaians for Sensible Growth was able to provide a one-voice that raised the skepticism of development, and its value to the island of Lānaʻi. I think, today, with windmills, you know, I think there's a greater need for a voice. But there's greater disunity. So you know, it's difficult because, again, it's the issue of how does Lānaʻi remain viable? I think it's going to require a tremendous amount of information that everybody needs.

I think people need to also recognize that they are caught in time, and they are caught on a place like Lānaʻi where they are, again, very isolated from a lot of support. They need to come together to provide what support they are not getting from outside. To be able to raise, I guess, a concern and a [means of]. But also to recognize the other side, the company, the one that owns the land who is proposing the significant change to the island. On one hand, articulating the need of this for the betterment of Lānaʻi and for Hawaiʻi, et cetera. At the same time, saying that, with this underlying threat of, “If we don’t get to do it, then essentially, this island becomes non-viable, and there’s a serious consideration of shutting down all economic activity on the island.” I think people need to understand that friends don’t threaten friends. (Laughs) And that if that is the basis for making the decision, that’s the wrong basis. So there needs to be a lot more to be done to get to the point that one doesn’t make decisions because of a threat. (Chuckles) I mean, that’s strictly my sense.

I don’t think friends threaten friends. So if Dole Company and Hawaiian Electric say they are doing this [i.e., windmills] for the betterment of Lānaʻi people and at the same time, saying, “But we’re going to hit you on the head with this hammer if you don’t,” then something’s wrong. Something’s not very honest about the whole proposition. So it’s a lot, I think, for Lānaʻi people to think about. But I think there should be enough of a sense that Lānaʻi is such a valuable—extremely valuable place. Not only in the minds and memories of people but I think for many other people that are still there, and for many more people that will be going over, and for my children and my grandchildren.

WN: Who lives on Lānaʻi now, and what do they do?

DH: You’re talking about the general population?

WN: Yeah.

DH: Most of the people employed there are employed by the company, in terms of the servicing of the two major luxury hotels. The other large employer would be government—school, police, social services, transportation.

WN: Are there still new immigrants going to Lānaʻi to live?

DH: I understand there’s a Micronesian population that’s growing there, so there may be.

WN: And what do they do? What kind of work?

DH: I’m not certain. But again, the primary employer, if there’s any growth in employment—which, I understand, there may not be, but it’s still a company. Lānaʻi is subject to the recession. I understand that there’s a significant amount of foreclosures that Lānaʻi has been experiencing. Prior to the recession, when the hotels were doing fairly well and development was still quite high, in terms of building new homes, there was enough opportunity for people to purchase homes, be able to maintain payments. But as the recession started affecting Lānaʻi, people lost jobs and were not able to maintain payments. So they’re just as subject to foreclosures as any other place. Maybe, percentage-wise, maybe even more.

WN: So you mentioned, you know, there are people who work in government and still working for the company and so forth. What about retirees who go to live on Lānaʻi now? I mean, are there luxury homes coming up or anything like that?

DH: There's many luxury homes that are already there, and there are still, from my understanding, more that are being built. So Lānaʻi, apparently, is still an attraction for people who want to maintain that kind of away-from-it-all lifestyle, you know. But also to be able to experience the significant beauty and niceness of the people. (Chuckles)

MK: I noticed that throughout these series of interviews, you've referred to Lānaʻi as "home." And then, when I look at your biography, you've spent decades away from home. Why is it that you still think of Lānaʻi as home?

DH: I still feel I never left. I feel that, like many commuters, you go out to work and eventually come back home. When I left, after working on Lānaʻi for thirteen years or so, I accepted my first principalship on Maui.

WN: Haʻikū [Elementary School].

DH: And then later on Kalama [Intermediate School]. I was there on Maui for six years.

END OF TAPE NO. 56-22-2-11

TAPE NO. 56-23-2-11

WN: Okay, this is tape number three, session two with Dennis Hokama.

DH: Okay.

MK: And we were just talking about how you've been able to maintain your identity as a Lānaian, despite your being, you know, away from the island physically for many decades.

DH: Lānaʻi is such a significant part of me, I think, you know. Even my own children sometimes make fun of me about my (chuckles) nostalgia for Lānaʻi. But my experiences of growing up there are a little bit different from theirs also because it was different periods. But it's such a unique kind of an island, and I think it was, therefore, a unique people. But the experiences of living someplace like Lānaʻi, which is so far removed from every other community, it's not like you're living in Waialua and then you can drive to Honolulu and do those kinds of things. Or it's not like Waialua, where people work in Honolulu, yeah? Everybody lives and works on Lānaʻi. So the sense of community is just different. It's just so strong. But much of my feeling and identity for Lānaʻi is nostalgia. But it's also, you know, very cliché, but it's very free from the hustle and bustle of larger communities. I built my own house on Lānaʻi, my shop teacher and I. He actually was the major brain or builder carpenter, you know. I hauled a lot of lumber and pounded nails, but we put a lot into constructing that home. It was not only physical labor, but it was also a tremendous amount of good feelings went into the construction. A lot of boiled peanuts and a lot of beer.

(Laughter)

WN: How far along are you in the building of the house?

DH: Oh, we actually—no, it's a completed house. My work on it now is actually renovating or improving and refurbishing what I had completed many, many years ago and left and abandoned, you know, when I continued my professional career here in Honolulu. But again, it was just leaving Lānaʻi to go to work, spending time here [Honolulu], but going home whenever I had the

opportunity. I know I'll be spending a lot more time there. Maybe more time there than here, after I finish my house project, which is into its fifth year now. Almost complete.

WN: Okay, I want to ask you, we were talking about the future of Lānaʻi, and what is the—in your opinion or your view—the best-case scenario for the future of Lānaʻi? What do you see, in say, twenty, thirty years?

DH: Twenty, thirty years?

WN: What you would like to see. Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty.

DH: I'd like to see people being able to work and live on the island without needing to physically wreck the environment of Lānaʻi. The ability to go to pristine beaches. The ability to be able to hunt and fish and be successful at it. Being able to enjoy the peace and quiet of not only the most densely populated part of the island, but any part of the island. It's such a wonderful place to exist and not be distracted by a lot of nuisances that we find elsewhere. And I think, it's possible.

For example, windmills on the island appears to be the big issue today because of the impact on the physical aspect of the island, which is really significant. I think people on the outside don't recognize how small the entire island is and the scale of these windmills. I think windmills are extremely beneficial, so maybe, just maybe, the windmills have to be there. So what kind of sacrifice is being asked of Lānaʻi people, I think at this time, is so one-sided in terms of, so what kind of cost should the company and Hawaiian Electric bear to make it worthwhile for them and at the same time, be able to benefit Lānaʻi people? For this power to tie into the Honolulu grid, or Oʻahu grid, and the Lānaʻi benefit, from what I understand at this point, is just to be able to enjoy the same benefit of a reduced rate that Oʻahu people have is, to me, totally unacceptable. It's so overbalanced towards the advantage of the company. But if one were to say, well, maybe if it means free power in perpetuity or for the life of the windmills on the island for Lānaʻi people, then maybe that's a beginning point. (Chuckles) Maybe.

WN: Is that one of the issues of the negotiation?

DH: I think one of the issues is to what extent the company and Hawaiian Electric can provide something that the community can benefit from. I'm not certain what's on the table, but I did read someplace where what was offered, what was presented was that, "Oh, then now Lānaʻi people can have the same rate for electricity that Honolulu people have." Because Lānaʻi does pay one of the higher electrical rates [in the state]. But to just say that, well, you destroy our pristine environment, and now you get to pay the same electric rate as Honolulu? I'm not so certain that's (chuckles) equitable.

WN: When you talked about, you know, growing up, the camaraderie, the togetherness and so forth, is that something you would like to see continue on the island?

DH: Oh, definitely. I think that's a primary element, a primary value that I would like to see. I think, by and large, Lānaʻi still has much of that. You know, when I do go back—when I do have an opportunity to see people and mingle with people that I'm familiar with. Although there's many, many new faces. I mean, it's a tremendous change. So the change today is lesser of that because there are many, many newer people who are there. But as time goes by, as you have a strong community, it's really a community that has longtime residents because there's a reason to be there and to feel that you can be there for many, many, many years. It should be the kind of place that people can be there because they feel they can raise their families there.

- WN: So the ideal goal should be to foster this community feeling or sense of place again.
- DH: Significantly, yeah. I think crises offer opportunities for that. Crises ought to be opportunities to bring people together. That's when people can define their values and construct plans around those values to be able to deliver what is important for everyone.
- WN: I asked you about the best-case scenario. What is the worst-case scenario, in your opinion?
- DH: The worst-case scenario is, I think, what Lānaʻi faces every day. It's a recognition that the viability of Dole and its tourist enterprise on Lānaʻi is really on the edge because it's not a great profit-making business. That it's allowed to continue at that marginal level because David Murdock allows this to happen—that allows Lānaʻi to exist. So if this one man no longer exists, for some reason or another, or decides that he's just pulling up stakes, then the worst is there's no economic viability. That's the worst case. (Chuckles)
- WN: You mean, if Murdock decided to sell the island.
- DH: If Murdock decided to sell the island or decides to shut down his resorts because I think it's still not a profit-maker. It's, I think, something that he runs on the basis that he gets some tax benefits because he has (chuckles) a business that's not making money. And Lānaʻi is a place that he enjoys being at and something that he can call his own—his own little treasure maybe, you know. That's kind of a real risky situation for Lānaʻi people—that they are dependent upon someone that is on very, very shaky grounds in terms of what his intentions are.
- WN: Okay, I just wanted to ask you one last question about the LCHC, Lānaʻi Culture and [Heritage] Center. What is the value of it? Do you think it's important? Why should we have it?
- DH: I am just so significantly impressed with what Kepa [Maly] has been able to do in terms of reviving and developing that center so that people have a real key insight about what Lānaʻi was, and what Lānaʻi is, and therefore, what Lānaʻi is very capable of being in terms of something that is extremely valuable not only culturally, but as far as just people existing and living and working together.
- WN: So what would you like someone who doesn't know anything about Lānaʻi, goes to Lānaʻi, and goes to that center—what would you like them to come out with? What kind of feeling or. . .
- DH: Having a sense that Lānaʻi really has a lesson for everybody. That Lānaʻi's past, Lānaʻi's experiences are really no different from everybody else's, other than the fact that we were able to capture all of this, and it has become, I think, much more intense for each one of us because of, again, our isolation. But I think the kinds of things that Lānaʻi people experience that was good for them, that was good for their development and growth, are the same kind of things that everybody else should be able to recognize. That there was a super strong sense of community. I think it's the sense that in order for us to be able to work together, to be able to defy and win in a crisis, required that we are all people that need to be respected. That we are respectable people and that there is such a thing as human dignity that requires to be recognized by everyone, (chuckles) especially our adversaries. That point needs to be made. I think, more than just survival, that people are going to feel good about their existence.
- WN: So in your opinion, was and is Lānaʻi a microcosm of Hawaiʻi? Or is it unique in Hawaiʻi?

DH: I think the intensity of how those particular forces and values that became such a strong part of each of us—I think it's probably unique.

WN: I think it came out very strongly in your interview, (DH chuckles) you know, the uniqueness. I think that's it.

MK: Yeah, that's it.

WN: Anything more you want to say before we . . .

DH: No.

WN: . . . turn off the tape?

DH: Yeah, that's it. (Laughs)

MK: Thank you.

WN: Thank you, Dennis, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

Lāna‘i:

Reflecting on the Past; Bracing for the Future

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
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